

Spiritual Message

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Grand Prioral Prelate (Chief of Chaplains)

While I write this, it is the weekend of the first Sunday of Advent. As liturgical seasons go, Advent is shorter than Lent, and actually the season of Christmas is even shorter- 12 days to be exact- and we certainly know more Christmas hymns than Advent hymns, and often end up singing Christmas hymns during the season of Advent. (Helpful hint: Do not make the suggestion to your parish pastor that it is best to skip over Advent and just start singing Christmas hymns. That would not be well received.)

So what, as members of the Order of St. Lazarus, are we to make of Advent other than it seems to be about a baby being born? First and foremost, it is about season of expectation and preparation of God taking on earthly form, taking on human flesh. For us as Lazarites, we know something about human flesh given our traditional and international ministry for those afflicted with leprosy, or as it is know today, Hansen's Disease. While at our recent meeting in Cabos, the presentation on one of the ministries we support, Rising Star, was absolutely riveting as so many of us watched the recent video of the those who were seeking to be healed, and watching the healing- the "re-skinning" or "re-fleshing" of their skin.

As Christians we have always understood the waiting and preparing for the incarnation of God as Christ-Christmas- being exactly that, God taking on the fleshly human form in Christ. This is a remarkable event that we remember and celebrate every year. And in the same way, as we partner in ministry with those treating those with leprosy, and this coming May many of us will make a pilgrimage to Hawaii to the sites of Fr. Damien's and Mother Marianne's ministry to those who suffered from leprosy.

It seems to me that it is not a leap of faith, but rather a straight line, that connects our historic ministry for those with leprosy to the expectant season of Advent which gives way to the Christ Child, God incarnate, in the flesh, just like us.

Let us pray: Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect/Prayer for the First Sunday of Advent, 1979 Book of Common Prayer)

Let us pray: Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon Him, and to be born (this day) of a pure virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen (Collect/Prayer for Christmas, 1979 Book of Common Prayer)

Pilgrimage Report

Some thoughts about the 2019 Holy Land Pilgrimage

By Patty Castillo de Milner, OLJ and RADM Mike Milner, KLJ (Grand Priory Hospitaller)



(Mike and Patty Milner overlooking the Dome of the Rock in Old Jerusalem)

Patty and I have traveled many places in our lives together. We've taken over a dozen cruises, visited unusual places like the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador and walked on the Equator of the world. But, we have never been on a trip as amazing as our 2019 Holy Land Pilgrimage sponsored by our Order.

Patty and I began our experience on a nonstop flight from NYC to Tel Aviv. We left NYC at 11 pm and arrived the next afternoon at 5 pm and were greeted by the man we would come to admire, respect and yes, LOVE, our tour guide, Rami Salfiti. We were swept up and transported to our home for the next 5 nights in Jerusalem, the American Colony Hotel. Our check in was swift and we found ourselves in a beautiful dining room meeting fellow travelers. There were many familiar faces and many new faces, but all with a similar look of excitement, fatigue and genuine amazement at the friendliness of the staff, the quality of the food and the wonderment of what was ahead for us. It was great to see folks whom we have seen at past Grand Prioral meetings but only had a glancing association with; Patty and I both knew that we would get to know all these folks better in the coming days. We were not wrong; in just a few days together we would find ourselves learning more about their families back home, stories of children, grandchildren, work projects and their spiritual life. This was a great 'added value' of this trip.

Of note, is that we arrived just one day ahead of the Israeli Independence Day and two days before the start of Ramadan, the Muslim holy period. Rami explained that he needed to make some critical adjustments to our daily itinerary in order to avoid traffic congestion due to road closures and other restrictions that would limit where we could go. He assured us that everything on our travel plan would be visited but that the sequence might be a bit different. Without dissension, our group voiced agreement with his schedule changes and voted to press on with the first day's required stops. We definitely covered some ground on day 1. My 'fit bit' EXPLODED in my pocket!! I logged more steps and MILES that day that I had in several days combined!! We logged nearly 8 miles the first day. Slow and steady wins the race I recall from my school days and it was clearly everyone's motto that day. We were both jet lagged and exhausted from our first 24 hours in Jerusalem, but, being the FOODIES that we are, we weren't about to miss dinner with our group that night. Rami's last words that evening when we departed the bus were..."Wake up calls will be at 0630, Breakfast from 7-8 am, and please, everyone, be on the bus at 8 o'clock SHARP!". After an incredible dinner with friends, we hit the pillow and it was "lights out" for me. However, for Patty, consistent with her regular nightly activity, read the Bible and learned about the places we would visit the next day. I'm so blessed to be married to her; she helped me with my 'homework' every night. Thank you Amor!!

The days flew by like a whirlwind; we visited all the places in Jerusalem and surrounding areas that you learn about in the Bible and in church. Gethsemane, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Mt. Zion, the Mount of Olives, the Wailing Wall, the Upper Room, King David's Tomb, and the Via Dolorosa. Nothing, I repeat, NOTHING hit me as hard as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. I haven't stopped thinking about it. It left a mark on my soul in a way that I can't describe.

Why do I love Rami, our tour guide? Well, it was Rami who made special arrangements for us to attend Catholic Mass at his parish, the Holy Sepulcher church. Patty, me and 7 others from our group made the early morning journey to the church departing the hotel at 0450 hrs. We were received in the outer chamber to Christ's Tomb and were able to receive Holy Communion in that place. As a newly made Catholic who had just experienced the Holy Week of Easter a few short weeks before, to receive the Eucharist in that most Holy place was the absolute highlight of my trip. We were able to venerate Christ's Tomb while the priest prepared the Eucharist, kneeling next to him at the site where our Lord and Savior was laid to rest after he was Crucified and then, in three days, rose from the dead to be seated at the right hand of the Father. Personally, I felt like I was raised up somehow by the power of God in that most Holy place. The experience made a profound impact on me. The images from that morning are constantly on my mind. That morning, Rami gave me a very special gift and I will never forget him or his gift. I started this paragraph with "why do I love Rami", well now you all know!!



(GPA 2019 Holy Land Pilgrimage / Church of the Nativity)

Honestly, all the other things we did on the trip were second to that experience; while all beautiful, enriching, incredible and exciting, NOTHING comes close to that Mother's Day Sunday morning, 12 May 2019. I have shared with many of my friends my own Mom's love for Jesus and how she never stopped talking about her trip to Jerusalem in 1985. Well, now I know why she never stopped talking about it. Walking in the places where Jesus walked, feeling his pain in Caiaphas dungeon when his punishment began, touching the place where His Cross stood when he was crucified on Golgotha, and praying in the tomb where he was laid but from which he was resurrected will forever be in my mind. Patty and I can't wait to go back. I know that others will write about their experiences on this 2019 Holy Land Pilgrimage in upcoming editions of our Grand Prioral Newsletter and I expect that they will touch on the dozens of other places we visited, things we saw, great food we ate, laughter we shared and how they also "blew up their fit bits" during our trip!! For me and for Patty, the trip strengthened our Love of God, our Love of each other and our Faith in His word. We are already planning to join the next Pilgrimage being planned by our Order for the spring of 2021. Patty had such a great time that she volunteered me (and her) to help with planning the next trip. If, after you read this short story and want to ask Patty or me about places like the Sea of Galilee, "Wine Tasting" in the Byzantine ruins, visiting multiple sites built by Knights of the Crusades, the places in the Holy Land that our Order supports with our Pentecostal Appeal donations, or if we preferred "St Peter's Fish or St. Peter's Chicken" in Tiberius, drop us a note or pull us aside at our next gathering. We will be more than happy to share more stories, but please expect to hear something about our experience at Sunday Mass in Christ's Tomb.

April 2021 Pilgrimage to the Holy Land with optional post Pilgrimage to Rome:

April 5 - April 15, 2021 (Holy Land) -- April 15 - April 19, 2021 (Rome)

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RISING STAR OUTREACH NON-PROFIT

EMPOWERS INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES TO RISE ABOVE THE STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH LEPROSY AND TO LIVE HEALTHY, PRODUCTIVE LIVES THROUGH QUALITY EDUCATION, MEDICAL CARE, AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.



RISING ABOVE TRAGEDY

In the wake of a painful family tragedy, Becky Douglas traveled to India after she discovered that her late daughter had been sending money to orphans there. During that trip, Becky witnessed the most deplorable conditions for people living with leprosy. When she returned home haunted by the images of the leprosy affected, she knew she had to step up and do something. With faith guiding her, she called four close friends around her kitchen table and there they formed Rising Star Outreach.

FROM ONE SMALL STEP

What began as a small charity serving a handful of patients in 3 colonies, along with 27 children in a rented building, has grown today to an organization with national reach. Rising Star Outreach is now educating over 1,000 children and serving the leprosy affected in more than 65 colonies, with projects and program services operating in 8 states throughout India. In the past 5 years alone, Rising Star Outreach has provided more than 150,000 instances of medical care and assistance.

PARTNERS IN HEALING

Rising Star Outreach's robust medical program provides dignity and health to the leprosy affected across India. For the past 11 years, The Military and Hospitaller Order of St. Lazarus has been a champion supporter of this work. Together, Rising Star Outreach and the Order of St. Lazarus have partnered to supply many important services, including: crucial medicines and medical supplies, two mobile medical units that provide consistent medical care to over 40 colonies, and support of a Micro Cellular protective footwear and devices unit, among many others. These services are literally changing and saving lives, with positive rippling effects that will impact generations to come.

A NEW VACCINE

The first preventative vaccination for leprosy has been developed and approved for distribution. This new vaccine has the potential to help eliminate this harmful disease within our lifetimes. Rising Star Outreach is working with the developer of this vaccination to determine how we can help with distribution of it, moving forward. Together, we have the ability to help change both individual lives and history! This is truly an exciting time to be a part of this work.



LEARN MORE AT:

RISINGSTAROUTREACH.ORG

WE AT RISING STAR OUTREACH BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF "ONE"

THAT ONE PERSON OR ONE GROUP REALLY CAN MAKE A LASTING DIFFERENCE. THE ORDER OF ST. LAZARUS HAS CONTINUALLY STEPPED UP TO THE CALL TO BE THE "ONE" AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO MANY MORE YEARS OF MOVING THE WORK FORWARD, TOGETHER.

TOGETHER, HOPE IS RISING.